

## SF Interview

Interviewer: Thank you again for taking part in this research. Tell me a bit about your background, Zufan.

SF: My name is Zufan, I am 31 years old. and I am from Asmara. I have been in the Netherlands for six years. I am living in Amsterdam now. Back in my country, I completed high school education. I have not attended Sawa (*compulsory military training after high school*). I have two twin girls, and I am currently attending a nursing course.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about the types of digital devices you're familiar with and how often you use them?

SF: Of course! I own a smartphone and a tablet. I use my phone regularly to communicate with friends and family. The tablet is mostly used by the girls than myself.

Interviewer: So, what features, software, or applications do you use on your mobile phone or tablet?

SF: Well, besides the social media apps, I use my phone for a lot of other things. I use it to search for information, to check my emails, and to browse the internet on various topics. I use applications like TikTok, Facebook, IMO,

Telegram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. I even make TikTok videos now and then!

Interviewer: Now let's talk about integration. Can you tell me what integration means for you?

SF: Integration, to me, means becoming a Dutch. I mean, when I first came here someone would come and ask me if I am Dutch. And I always was wondering why they would ask such a question, especially seeing that I am a black person. But gradually, I saw that there are black people who are Dutch. So, as I understand it if I learned the language, and start speaking fluently, I would be one of them. I have seen Arabs and Africans who have lived here for many years and some of them who were born in here, who identify themselves as Dutch. That is how I used to joke around with my friends, if I worked hard, learn the language, got my self-education, and be able to find a job with my diploma, then I will say I have become Dutch.

Interviewer: So far, how has the integration process been for you?

SF: Well, for me it has been very challenging. But I also have personal reasons which made it more challenging. When I first came, I was enthusiastic and very happy to have arrived here safely, because it was a matter of life and death for me and many of my friends. We went through a horrible journey. Then at the refugee camp, I started learning the language

myself way before we start taking a course. My older sister was here before me, so I didn't have to be at camp all the time. I was staying with my sister and going to camp to put my signature once a week. Things were better for me to start with. Because the camps were far away from cities, where you don't even have a city in walking distance. I think that doesn't feel good, especially after the journey we have been through. After a year or something, I fell in love with my current husband and have these twins unexpectedly. I have a small studio for a single person. But four of us live there. It has been very tough to have twins and raise them in a very small studio apartment where there is no even a space for them to play and run like their peers. That made me lag behind with my education. Luckily they started going to a daycare last year and I started attending a nursing program. Even though it has been very challenging, I am grateful for my little princess and for my life in this country. I am also happy I started school.

Interviewer: Have digital skills played a role in your integration process? If so, can you elaborate on how?

SF: If you mean using the internet and computer, yes I think so. Being able to use digital technologies has been crucial in accessing information and different types of services. For example, I have used online videos and

lessons to learn the Dutch language. Also in my classes, we have a platform where we access information, assignments, and so on.

Interviewer: I see. Have you faced any challenges using digital technologies in the Netherlands?

SF: Well, personally for me I used to be a huge social media user. I faced the challenge of balancing when I welcomed my twins into the world. I had a huge presence, had many friends and connections, I also loved to share their adorable moments on Facebook, and Instagram. But, I soon learned that using social media and motherhood, especially if you are a mother of two was not easy. My babies needed all my focus and energy, and I had little time left for using social media. I had to adjust and put my twins' needs first over my online activity. However, as they grew up and started going to the daycare I found ways to enjoy social media without affecting my time with them. Now, I have an Instagram account where I post their photos and feature them in TikTok sometimes. I am a big user of TikTok. TikTok has become a platform for sharing many cultural elements like dance, music, food, and so on. So it helps people to be in touch with their culture. Especially for those who were born here.

Interviewer: That is nice, have you faced other challenges using digital technologies like language barrier or other issues?

SF: Yes, there have been some challenges. Some apps and websites can be difficult to access, as they are in Dutch and even English. Language is actually the most common challenge, be it in using digital technologies or accessing services in different organizations.

Interviewer: Have you used any online platforms or resources to learn Dutch or other languages? How effective have these been?

SF: Yes, I have used YouTube mainly, I liked there was this Dutch lessons channel in YouTube. I watched their videos, and they also have different lessons in PDFs. I gained a lot more from the internet than from the Dutch course I took. They have been quite effective in providing me with the Dutch language skills. As I told you, at that time I was very passionate and had all the time to learn the language. I also watched TV shows and movies in Dutch.

Interviewer: Do you use any online platforms or apps to connect with other refugees or people from your home country? How has this affected your sense of community and belonging in the Netherlands?

SF: Social media have been essential for me to connect with other refugees and with people from Eritrea. I use Telegram and WhatsApp to keep in touch with friends. I think having these connections made life easier here for many of us. You will always find Eritreans in groups, sharing different life events. And it is all made possible because of these technologies.

I also joined WhatsApp groups and communities for Eritreans in the Netherlands. We have groups, big groups for everyone, and religious groups.

Interviewer: Have you been able to connect with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events?

SF: Yes, mainly via the contacts at school and my sister's friends. My sister moved to Ethiopia a few years ago, but when she was here she connected me with many of her friends. However, it hasn't been as much as I'd liked due to my busy schedule with taking care of my kids and now the nursing program. But whenever I can, I try to participate in community gatherings and events.

Interviewer: Have you used any digital tools or platforms to connect with Dutch people or participate in Dutch social events?

SF: Yes, WhatsApp?

Interviewer: Have you been able to find employment since arriving in the Netherlands? If not, what are the challenges you face in finding a job?

SF: No I haven't worked in the Netherlands, my husband does. At first due to my babies and now because of school.

Interviewer: Do you feel that digital skills are important in accessing basic services in the Netherlands? Have you used any digital tools or resources to help you navigate the Dutch system and access these services?

SF: Yes, I strongly believe that digital skills are very important to access basic services here in the Netherlands. If you see the services here almost all of them are available online, banking, shopping, appointments, hospitals, and everything. It is necessary to have the know-how of digital technologies and the internet.

I have indeed used digital technologies and platforms to help me access various services in the Netherlands. For example, I have used government websites like the IND's, because that is what I use mostly. I regularly use my clinic's website to make and change appointments, especially since the birth of my babies. I use online forms to apply for benefits and other assistance. I already said how I used YouTube to learn the language.

Interviewer: Have you faced any challenges in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, or housing in the Netherlands?

SF: Yes, language challenge has sometimes made it challenging to understand all the information provided on the websites and applications. Many websites and applications are only available in the Dutch language, which can be difficult for newcomers like me especially before you learn the

language. The language problem is not just in the digital realm. Dutch organizations communicate primarily in Dutch. So we receive letters and everything in Dutch. A lot of my friends are actually not able to understand the letter or use a translation tool. But let's say you can use a translation tool, but you can only get a better translation if it is English to Dutch or vice versa. Give Google Dutch text and ask it to translate to Tigrinya, and it gives you all nonsense. So, that is a huge challenge I think. Also, may not be related to digital technologies, but many of us have seen a lot things in Eritrea, Sudan Libya, and crossing the sea. Many people die on the way, and many people have been affected mentally afterward. But here, you stay in camp and continue to live as if nothing has happened. Is that possible? I don't think so. That itself creates challenges in learning the language. I have faced housing problems ever since my babies were born. Even though that is not related to digital issues. But I have complained to the municipality and other parties online and offline.

Interviewer: Have you had any opportunities to attend digital skills training programs or workshops in the Netherlands? If so, can you describe your experience and how it has benefited you?

SF: No



Interviewer: Finally, what kind of support or resources do you think would be beneficial in helping refugees like yourself in the Netherlands improve their digital skills and enhance their integration?

SF: I believe providing more accessible and comprehensive digital skills training would be very very helpful. Also, having language support on various online platforms and resources which are targeted specifically for refugees would make a huge difference.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, SF, for sharing your experiences.

SF: You're welcome. Good luck with your research!